

BLACKFELLOW BUNDI

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A Native Australian Boy

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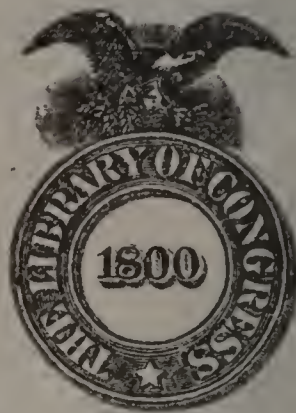
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EILA and KILROY HARRIS

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BLACKFELLOW BUNDI





In the morning Bundi woke to the sound of laughter

BLACKFELLOW BUNDI

A Native Australian Boy

By
LEILA and KILROY HARRIS



Pictured by
KURT WIESE

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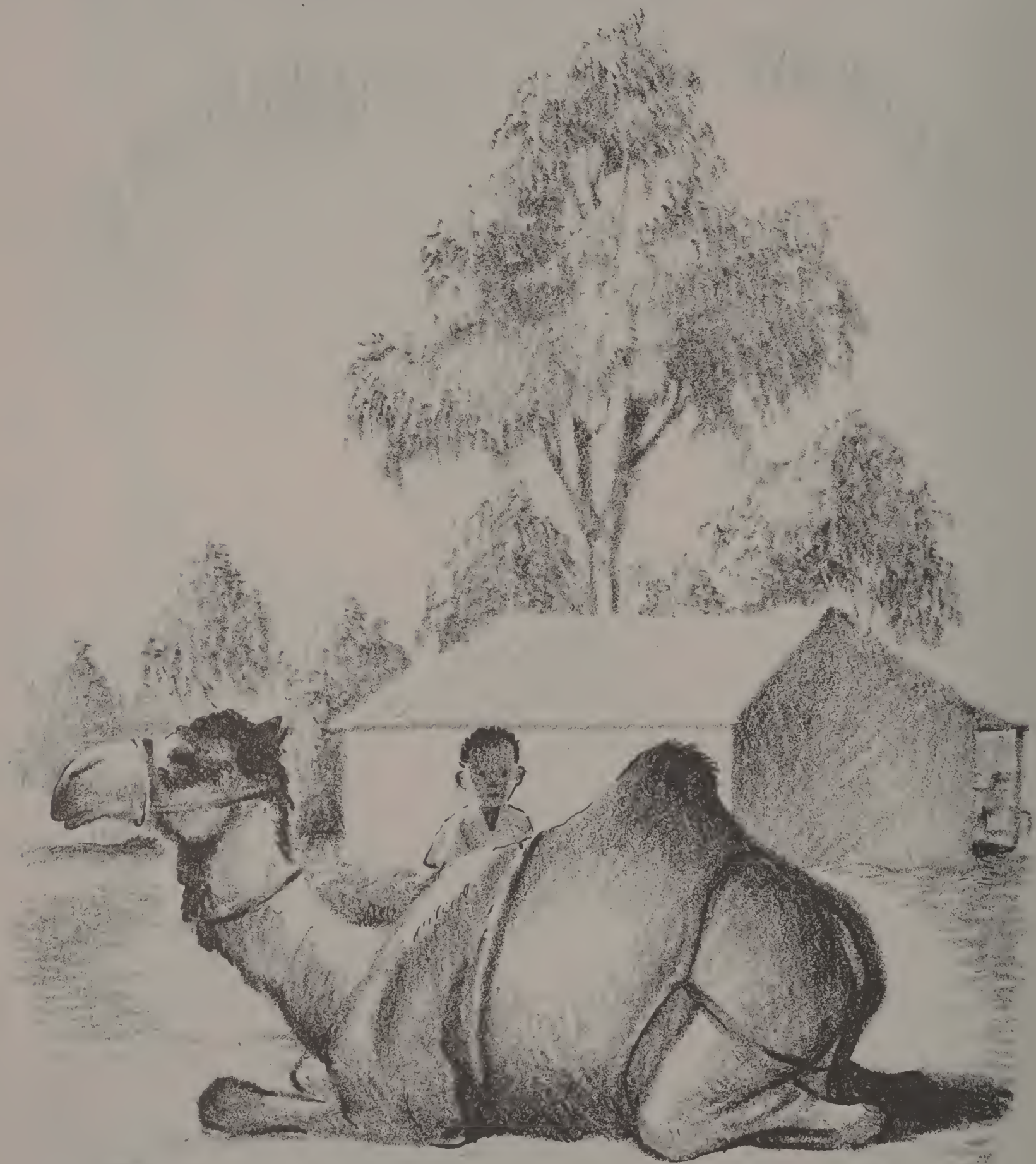
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We dedicate this book

To

Children short and children tall,
Flat as Jack Sprat or round as a ball,
To children black and yellow and white,
Who are sometimes bad, but want to do right.



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Chapter I

A HOMESICK LITTLE BOY

MANY stars shone. The heat of the day still hovered over the Australian plains, but little gusts of cool air chased each other among the gray-green saltbush. They played between some little *gunyahs*, or huts, which stood together on Booralong cattle station. Into each open doorway went the cool air. It roused one little aboriginal boy from his troubled sleep.

Bundi stretched his black arms upward. The breeze felt good. He was used to wind on his naked body. But when he opened his eyes, the darkness above seemed strange. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't see the stars.

"Clouds," thought Bundi, "and rain to break the long dry spell. Rain to make the grass spring up and the kangaroos return to feed."

Then through the doorway in the *gunyah*, Bundi saw the stars. The blackness above him was not clouds; it was the roof of a strange *gunyah*. He rushed out from the *gunyah* as if it were a prison and he were about to be locked in.

Suddenly Bundi remembered why he was not lying out under the stars as he had done since babyhood. His mother and father had gone to the Spirit Land. They had hungered for kangaroo meat and for berries, for any kind of food.

But there was no food, so they had wasted away with a sickness, as had his little sisters and brothers and many others of the tribe. The magic and the spells of old Mirrabindi, the Medicine Man, had not saved them.

Bundi had come to Booralong, a white man's cattle station. There was always food at Booralong for blackfellows who would work for the white man. He had slept in one of the *gunyahs* that clustered around the station. Bundi looked at the strange *gunyahs*. The walls were made of tree branches that had been stuck in the ground in a circle and tied together at the top. The whole had been covered with old cloth sacks and pieces of tin.

Bundi wondered why the aboriginals who lived at Booralong should need more than a sheet of bark thrown over a pole. They were strange blacks, he thought, and had forgotten the ways of their own people on the plains.

Soon Yangella came to get him. Yangella was the big, kindly man of Bundi's own tribe who had brought the little boy to the cattle station. Bundi followed Yangella to the fire, where the food was cooking. Here Yangella stooped and picked up a piece of *damper*, or bread, from its oven of ashes. He broke off two large pieces and brushed the ashes from them as he held them out to Bundi. When the boy had bitten into the *damper* he saw that it was white inside and there were no hard seeds. Because



*Bundi followed Yangella to the fire, where the food
was cooking*

the food was strange, it seemed bad to Bundi, and he wanted to spit it out. But too many eyes were watching.

Bundi thought about the camping places which had been home to him. He remembered how his mother had looked with the soft glow of the fire shining in her face. A lump rose in his throat, as though a chunk of *dampier* were choking him. His whole body trembled with wishing that he might be safe around his own campfire again.

When he had finished eating, Yangella took him to a building where there were shelves filled with large boxes. It was the station store, and one of the white men gave Bundi a little blue shirt and a pair of trousers to wear. He thought them a kind of decoration. He remembered how the men of his tribe decorated themselves for *corroboree*, or the native dance, by sticking feathers on their bodies and painting themselves with chalkstone.

Bundi put on the shirt and trousers and danced about happily, forgetting for a moment that he was in a strange place. The white man laughed and Bundi kept on dancing just to please him.

"Good fella," said the white man.

"Good fella," said Bundi, over and over again. He had learned his first bit of white-man talk.

As they walked back along the path, Yangella told Bundi about the work which the stockmen did—how they rounded up the cattle, branded them, drove them to market, and kept the fences mended.

"But that is *lubra's* work!" he said to Yangella in their own language. In Bundi's tribe, only women did such work; the men were all brave hunters. Their only work was to hunt kangaroos or to fight enemies. "Do you do *lubra's* work, too, Yangella?" he asked.

"If blackfellow wants to eat, blackfellow must work," was

the only answer. For a moment Yangella hung his head as if he were ashamed of the work he had to do. Not so long ago he, too, had felt as Bundi did. But he had soon learned that the white men had different ideas about work from those of his own people.

As Bundi wandered among the men and children at the cattle station, no one noticed that he was a stranger, because now he was wearing clothes like all the others. He walked silently among the groups, all talking and laughing happily—talking white man's talk which Bundi could not understand.

As he watched the children racing and playing, he thought of the good times that he used to have with his own people. He remembered the fun he had had with a boomerang, trying to throw it so that it would whirl around and come back to his hand. Suddenly a great wave of homesickness came over him. He wanted the old friends and the old games.

"When the rains come, I will 'go bush'," Bundi promised himself, "back to my own people. Then I will forget all about the cattle station and the white men who do *lubra's* work." To "go bush" meant to return to his native wild bush country to live.





Chapter II

THE HUNTERS RETURN

Weeks passed and still the rains did not come.

Bundi learned more and more whitefellow talk and whitefellow work, but all the time he hugged his secret close and it comforted him. He did not tell Yangella that he was planning to go bush as soon as the rains came, for Yangella would try to stop him. And anyway, Bundi now had something else to wait for besides the rains.

The white men had gone on a hunt, and Bundi longed to see the excitement when they returned. There would surely be a feast and shouting and singing and dancing—a kind of whitefellow *corrobboree*. And the one who thrust the spear that killed the kangaroo—how proud *he* would be.



The brumby charged right toward the horse and rider

Day after day Bundi sat on the stockyard fence searching the plains for a far sight of the returning men. His eyes were like those of an eagle, and one day, far, far in the distance he saw a tiny cloud low on the plains. His heart beat fast. He knew that this was not the rain cloud for which he had been waiting so long. It was a dust cloud. The hunters were coming back to Booralong.

As they came near, Bundi saw two horses without riders, being driven along ahead of the group. They were *brumbies*, wild horses of the plains. So the men had not been hunting kangaroos! There would be no feast that night!

As the *brumbies* dodged, reared, and circled about, the stockmen gradually hemmed them in and forced them toward the yards. They were glorious red-brown creatures, their heads arched and their tails like plumes. Everyone at the cattle station, white and black alike, was watching the exciting chase as the hunters neared the gateway to the paddock. The *brumbies* were filled with fear. But every time they tried to break away to the open plains, a horse and rider blocked the way.

It would have been easy, thought Bundi, to throw a spear and kill a *brumby*. Forcing them through the gateway was far more difficult. Suddenly Bundi gasped, partly with fear for the rider and partly with wonder that he could sit his horse so well. As one of the horses sidestepped to block a *brumby*, the *brumby* charged right toward the horse and rider. The horse reared on his hind legs as if he would claw the *brumby* with his front hoofs. All the while the stockman sat his horse as if it were gently trotting across the plains.

Bundi was thrilled. His eyes gleamed. "Good! Goodfella horse!" he shouted. And rushing into his mind came a new wish — to be a stockman some day, to ride a horse, to chase *brumbies*.

Soon all the *brumbies* were in the yard and the slip rails were again in place. Now the wild horses galloped round and round, looking in vain for the opening which might set them free. Bundi knew how they felt. He had felt that same way the first night he had slept at Booralong. A new longing for freedom and a fear of white men and their stations surged into the boy's heart as he watched the imprisoned horses.

When the *brumbies* were all safely in the stockyard, the station men went back to their work. The excitement was over. Bundi felt cheated, after his days and days of patient waiting. Always in his tribe there had been a real *corrobboree* when the men came back from a kangaroo hunt. But white men were different. All their ways were different.

So Bundi went back to his work. A *lubra's* work it was—this job of watering the hundreds of garden plants each day. He was still ashamed to do *lubra's* work. But he dared not tell the others the shame and ache that was in his heart. He took up the pail and walked up and down the long rows, giving each plant a little water.

Very often Bundi looked up from his work to stare at the big windmill over by the water tank. He could not understand how it pumped the water which came bubbling out of the big iron pipe that was sunk in the ground up to the big wooden tank high above the ground. And how did the water get into the pipe in the garden? To Bundi, it was all a part of white man's magic.

As he looked at the "big *gunyah* with wings," which he had named it, he spoke to it, using soft aboriginal words which flowed as free as the water. "You smart Medicine Man. All time make water come on. Blackfellow Medicine Man, Mirra-bindi, no can make water come, and Bundi's people die. You make water come on for white man. White man have plenty food longa garden."

Today the white man seemed stronger than ever to Bundi. He could shut *brumbies* in when they wanted to run over the plains with their kind. He could make blackfellows do *lubra's* work. So, because Bundi could not understand, fear stayed in his little heart.





Chapter III

BUNDI GOES BUSH

Another week went by and the rains had not yet come. Bundi was still at Booralong. He dared not leave, he dared not go bush until the rains came. If he went before, he would die of thirst out on the plains.

Then one day a message came from the head stockman saying that the first lot of cattle would be in on the Flats the next day. What excitement there was at the cattle station. The cattle round-up on the Flats was the biggest event of the year.

Bundi wished that he might ride a horse out to the Flats. Instead of that, he walked along beside the cook's wagon, which he had helped to fill with cabbages, potatoes, and carrots from the garden. How the men out on the Flats would enjoy these fresh vegetables after eating bread and dried beef for many days.

Even if he couldn't ride a horse, it was good to be away from the buildings and to see only the open plains again. Bundi picked some of the saltbush leaves and pressed them between his fingers. How could the cattle live on these leaves through the long dry season, he wondered. Bundi wished that he could eat leaves. Then he would never have to go back to the cattle station and do woman's work.

Finally, in the afternoon, they reached the place called Poker Flats, which was filled with cattle. Bundi thought that all the kangaroos he had ever seen would not make so large a herd. Over the far edge of the Flats puffed little clouds of dust, showing that more cattle were being driven in.

Cows were bawling to their calves, and young bulls were bellowing in anger at being driven from their pasture lands. Young steers were trying to break away from the mob. Stockmen on prancing horses were circling the mob and holding it on the Flats.

Bundi wanted to watch the musterers but he had to build the fire. Soon the cook was putting cabbage, carrots, onions, potatoes, and fresh meat into the huge iron kettle hanging over the flames. Then he made strong black tea in a big black "billy can." Bundi waited on the men, who all chattered and laughed as they ate.

The noisy chatter and laughter of the men went on as they came back for two and three helpings of the stew. Only Bundi looked gloomy.

"Hurry up there, boy," one of the musterers called to Bundi, "bring us some tea. You're as slow as one of these old cows."

Bundi hung his head. He was ashamed that he had to serve these men the way the *lubras* served the men of his tribe. When the meal was over and Bundi had finished washing up, he went up on a rise of land where he could see all that was going on.

Bundi watched the cattle stirring and dodging about while the stockmen rode among them and began cutting out certain animals from the mob. And a queer kind of excitement gripped him. He had felt this same way when he had watched the men of his tribe making ready for a kangaroo hunt. How thrilling it would be to ride one of those prancing horses, to be a stockman and to bring in cattle instead of kangaroos.

Bundi's eyes danced as he watched Split, one of the stockmen, and his horse Charger. Charger and Split were enjoying the fun. Charger shied away from the mob of cattle and pranced on tiptoe. He seemed to be frightened—as if he had never been in a cattle camp before. But it was all a part of the game. Split let Charger rear and sidestep and snort. But when he said, "All right, Charger, stop that playing; it's work time now," the horse steadied down and went after a half-grown calf.

That one was easy. Charger headed it out to a waiting stockman who sent it on to the branding yards. Then Charger was back in the mob, ready for Split to show him the next calf to be cut out.

Bundi pretended that he was on Charger and that the horse was obeying every pressure of his hands or his heels or his legs. When Charger stopped suddenly, bracing his four feet to block a red and white calf that did not want to leave its mother, Bundi braced his feet too. Then Charger sprang into action, and Bundi swung his arms just as Split did when he headed the calf off the camp.

The work went on until sunset. Other stockmen took their turns and the work went faster and was more difficult. The calves that were cut out first had been easy. They were all in the branding yard. But the young steers that were to be sent to market were tricky.



Each stockman cut out two or three, and then rested his horse while another stockman took a turn. There was one white and brown steer which Bundi thought would never be driven out, for he seemed quicker than the horse. Angry and frightened, the steer lowered his head to charge. The horse sidestepped just in time, whirled like a top, and sent the steer hurrying toward the yard. As Bundi watched, he wondered if the steer would keep on fighting for freedom, once he was fenced in.

Suddenly Bundi felt a fear of being shut in on the station, just as the steers were shut in by the fences. At first the mustering had seemed an exciting game; now it seemed a fearful thing. Bundi wanted to get away from the white men who could build such strong fences and who could make him do woman's work. He forgot all about wanting to be a stockman and to ride a horse. He wanted to go to his own people.

Bundi started to run, like a wild little creature that is seeking its freedom. He gave no thought to the direction in which he fled. He wanted only to get away from the camp and the yards. The bush, the plains, the kangaroos, and all his people were calling him. Bundi was answering that call and nothing else mattered. His wild little heart made music like the thud, thud, of kangaroo tails pushing big hopping bodies.

As he ran, he stripped off his blue shirt and his trousers and threw them away. They belonged to the white man and all that Bundi was running from. They did not belong with the people and things that were calling Bundi.

The wind on his naked body felt good. He swung his arms, glad of freedom from clothes. He wished that he could have let down the rails so that the steers could run free too. He imagined the steers running with him, their tails straight out behind their backs. But the steers were not with Bundi. He was hurrying on alone, one little boy on the vast Australian plains.





Chapter IV

BUNDI MEETS A SUNDOWNER

Bundi cut across the open plains, enjoying the swish of tall dry grass against his legs. He skirted clumps of saltbush, and then without even thinking, began to follow the cattle tracks. It was comforting to be running along a cattle trail, a way where other live things had gone.

Bundi was headed for the best possible place to spend the night—the Oolong bore. When he saw the big iron pipe standing as high above the ground as himself, it startled him. He had been keeping his eyes on the tracks. Water was flowing from the pipe into a large, basin-like tank.

He knew that Booralong stockmen had sunk the pipe and scooped out the earthen tank so that cattle might drink. He was thirsty. He lay down on the red sand at the edge of the tank and scooped up big handfuls of water which was almost hot. Steam rose from the water which was pouring from the pipe.

The little boy lay quietly for a long time. It was good to be still and alone. He almost forgot about his hunger. It seemed enough just to know that he was a little bit nearer his own people.

Then he remembered that many of his people had died because they could not find food and water. The rains had not yet come, and food and water would be hard to find now. A great wave of fear and loneliness swept over him and he started to cry. Suddenly he thought, "I never saw my father cry, and I must be like my father." And the thought held back the tears.

Next morning Bundi awakened to the smell of smoke. Not far away was a strange man, baking bread over a campfire. With the instinct of a wild creature, Bundi kept perfectly still, watching every move of the stranger. The man's blanket roll lay near, showing that he had camped there for the night. And because no harm had come to Bundi during the night, he was not afraid.

He was sure that this man was not from a cattle station, because stockmen never wore such ragged clothing. Nor was it someone sent to bring him back to Booralong, for white men never tried to keep blackfellows when they wanted to go bush.

There was a sudden hissing, and steam rose from the fire as water boiled over from the tin can hanging above the flames. Bundi jumped up to take the can off the fire, and at that moment the stranger turned and saw him. The man grabbed the can, then dropped it quickly.

"Him hot; him bite hand," said Bundi, as if he had been camping with the man for months.

"Put that lid on and keep that tea hot," said the man, still shaking his burned hand.

Bundi obeyed, then stood quietly, not knowing whether to go or stay.

"Sit down," said the man, as he went on about his camp work.

He fastened his blanket roll with two straps and then put into his tucker or provision bag the little bit of flour, baking powder, and salt which were left after making *damper*.

Bundi watched in silence, wondering who this man could be. His blue eyes looked kind. His face, almost as dark as Bundi's, was wrinkled by the wind and by years of living.

"You go Booralong?" asked Bundi.

The man went on with his work as though he had not heard, and Bundi did not speak again. The man scraped a few ashes off the *damper* and then, satisfied that it was baking nicely, covered it and sat down on the same side of the fire as Bundi. For a few minutes the man and the boy watched the thin blue smoke drifting away. Then, still watching the smoke, the man answered Bundi's question.

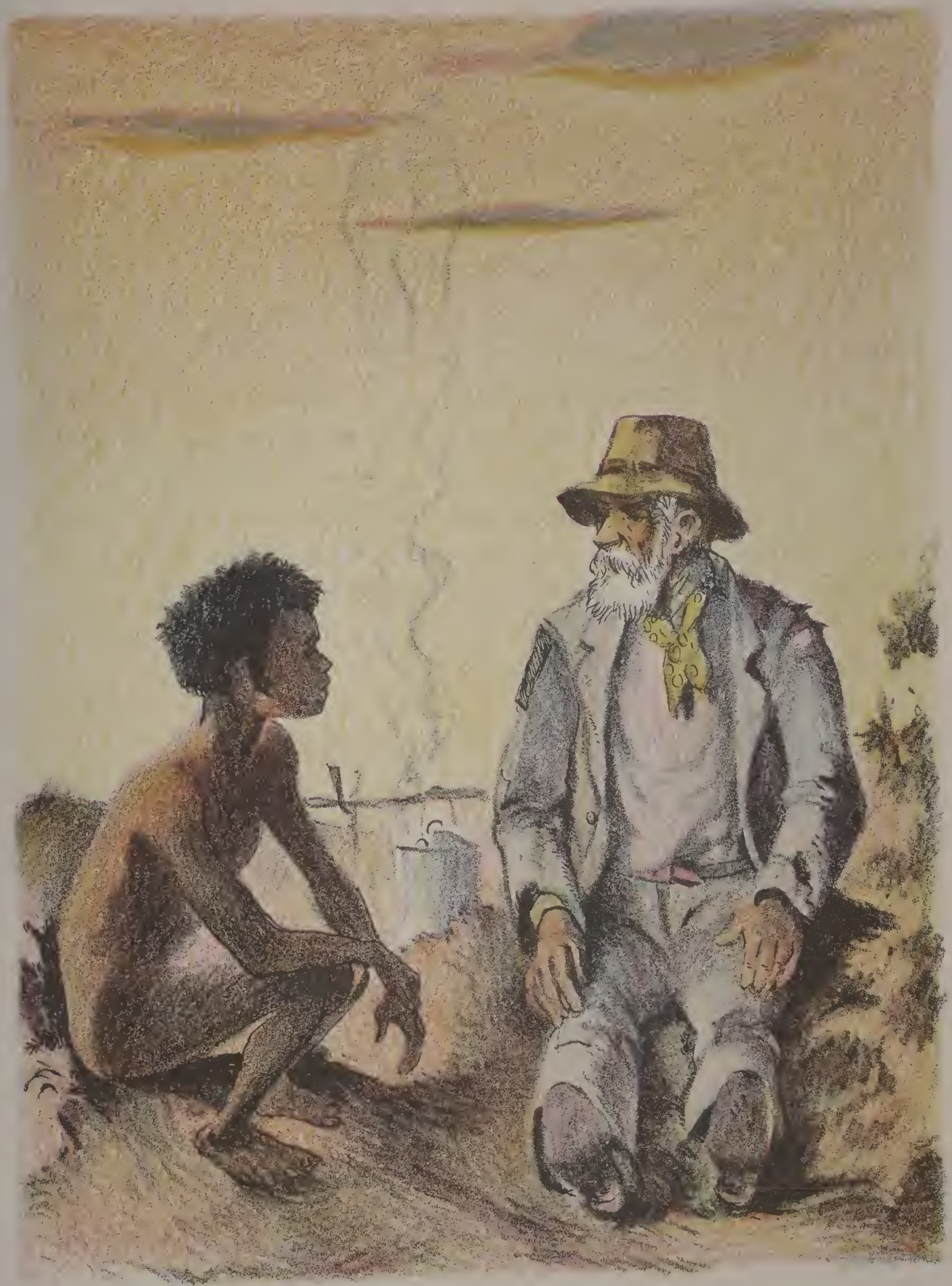
"Yes, I'm headin' for Booralong. Have to get the tucker bag filled. Is the cook a good sort?"

Bundi wondered how the man knew that he was from Booralong. But he only said, "Cook will give big mob tucker."

"Sundowner's luck!" said the man, half to himself.

Bundi remembered hearing the cook grumble about the Sundowners. They were the strangers who always arrived at sundown, when they knew it was too late to do a bit of work for the food they wanted. The men at Booralong didn't think much of Sundowners, but Bundi thought they were the nicest kind of white men because they lived much as his own people did. They wandered over the plains or through the bush, stopping now and then at a station, but never caring about anything except food and water and being free.

Bundi sniffed the air. The *damper* was burning. The Sundowner quickly pulled the loaf from its oven of ash. When it had cooled a bit, he handed half of the loaf to Bundi and motioned



The man sat down on the same side of the fire with Bundi

him to take a pot of tea. Bundi crammed large hunks of bread into his mouth. How hungry he was, and how good the food tasted!

As the Sundowner packed up, he said to Bundi, "The black-fellow camp is far away, over in that direction." He pointed to the edge of the plains where the sun was making the sky as red as the sand they sat on.

Bundi's heart beat fast with excitement and longing. He must hurry toward the camp of his people.

"Dank you big mob," he said, as he had learned to do at Booralong. Then, as though to give something in return, he added, "You goodfellow. Cook will give big mob tucker."

In another moment Bundi had started off toward the black-fellow's camp, without a single backward look at the man by the campfire. He had only his two small hands to help him live alone on the plains. But Bundi was not afraid. Was he not the son of the bravest man in the tribe?





Chapter V

TRACKS IN THE GULLY

As Bundi walked over the plains he wondered why white men needed so much room for their cattle. There was very little land left for the blackfellows. The plains belonged to the white men now. Perhaps blackfellows would always have to live on cattle stations and eat the meat of cattle, when the kangaroos were gone. Fear again swept over Bundi, and he hurried on, hoping to reach the water hole and camp with his own people that night.

When dusk was settling over the plains Bundi came to a line of gum trees, whose white trunks gleamed softly in the oncoming darkness. The trees seemed like familiar friends, and Bundi ran to touch them. He pulled off a few strings of brown bark which still clung to the white trunks. When the trees shed their bark it made him think of a snake shedding its skin.

In the dim light Bundi could see that he was on the edge of a gully. Down below must be the water hole that the Sundowner had told about. Underfoot there was a tangle of coarse grass and fallen leaves. Bundi stepped lightly and lovingly. After the burning plains, this grass felt like a cool, soft carpet to his bare brown feet. He pressed his hot body against the cool white trunk of the tree. "This is my home," he thought, "these trees belong to blackfellow."

As Bundi went farther into the strip of bush that fringed the river course, he saw that the leaves were turning yellow. "Plants sick too. Rain no come on," he thought as he hurried toward the water hole.

Bundi was oh, so thirsty and oh, so hungry. Far back on the plains he had eaten the last bit of bread that the Sundowner had given him. He hurried down the gully, climbing over fallen logs and making his way through the tangled grass, looking for the water hole which he *must* find.

There was no stream. Only a muddy pool lay in the river bed. But to Bundi it seemed like a fine little water hole. Any water looked very good to the tired, unhappy little boy. Thirsty as he was, Bundi did not drink at once. He walked carefully around the pool, looking for tracks—blackfellow tracks, kangaroo tracks, any kind of tracks that would tell if any living creature had been there. But the mud was dry and no tracks could be seen. So Bundi lay down beside the pool, scooped up the water in his hands, and drank.

Throughout that long, hot day Bundi had kept trudging on, hopeful of finding his people by nightfall. But now, hope was gone. His heart was heavy and his legs were heavy, too heavy for him to lift. If only he had found some little sign—a footprint in the mud or a mark of a *coolamon*, one of the small, trough-like



Bundi scooped up the water in his hands, and drank

vessels his people used to carry water. Wretched with loneliness and disappointment, Bundi lay on the ground and buried his face in the dead leaves. If he could only hide from his own sad thoughts!

The sounds of bush creatures settling for the night made the little boy more lonely. Each had a place to go, a place he knew, a place where he could sleep in safety. Only Bundi was far from his own kind. He had no campfire, and he had no fire stick to make one.

In the morning Bundi woke to the sound of laughter, the strange wild laughter of the kookaburra. The bird was sitting on the limb of a tall gum tree, looking down at a big snake on the ground. Bundi had often seen a kookaburra swoop down, grab a snake behind the head, carry it up to a high perch, and then let it drop. Time after time the bird would do this. Finally when the snake lay quiet, the kookaburra would burst out into a long, rollicking laugh.

As the bird's laugh ran through the bush again, Bundi laughed too, and there was joy in his laugh like the joy of a wild creature. Surely he would find his people this day!

Driven by a terrible hunger, the little boy began to dig in the soft mud at the edge of the pool. His eyes brightened while his hands were still under the muddy water. He was gripping a squirming crayfish.

Bundi wished that he could cook the fish, but he had no fire stick. Greedily he tore the flesh apart and began to eat the raw meat. Several times his hands dived into the water and brought up more food. There would be other pools along the river course, where he would find more fish and perhaps footprints, too. So with new strength and hope, Bundi hurried along the gully.

As he walked along he saw a mother koala—a small, bear-like

animal—settling down in the fork of an old gum tree for her day's sleep. Her *joey* or baby clung to her back, with eyes closed but with his claws tightly gripping his mother's fur. They had been feeding all night on the tenderest gum leaves, and the mother had been giving her baby some lessons in climbing along the branches. He was such a tiny koala, Bundi thought that he had never been out of his mother's warm pouch before.

As he went farther along the gully, the tree ferns were large and sheltering. Soon Bundi came to another small water hole. This one had a wider rim of mud along its edges. Bundi knelt down and looked carefully for tracks. A sharp footprint near the outer edge of the rim of mud caused his heart to beat fast with excitement. This mark made by a human being seemed like a message from his own people. Soon he found another and another.

Then Bundi stopped in sudden wonder. These footprints were strange to him. Could he have forgotten the tracks that he had learned so well? These must have been made by men of another tribe, perhaps an enemy tribe. His heart beat faster still, but with fear instead of hope.

Then Bundi noticed that the tracks were far back from the edge of the water. They had been made when the mud was soft and when there was much more water than now. These were old tracks, made many days ago. Perhaps there would be other footprints at the next pool. So he hurried on.

Night came again, but Bundi had found no more tracks. He had stopped his thirst with the muddy water in the pools, and he had stopped his hunger with lily roots. Like one of the little bush creatures, he nestled down for the night among some dead leaves in a little hollow.

The night creatures—the owls, the koalas, the flying foxes—

were busy with the work of hunting food. The day creatures, like Bundi, were seeking rest. Some went by softly on padded feet. Bundi smiled as he heard the soft thump, thump of a little kangaroo. The twitter of a wren from the low bushes and the sleepy call of a bird in a treetop died away. The chattering of the flying foxes went on, a natural part of the night life of the bush. Because it was natural, Bundi was at peace, and he quickly fell asleep.





Chapter VI

AT THE RABBITERS CAMP

For three days Bundi searched for footprints or old campfires, but he found none. He found water enough, and also food—crayfish, plant roots, and wild honey. Bundi had often watched his mother gather roots, so he knew which ones were good. He was glad that his father had shown him how to find wild bees' nests in the treetops. Whenever he saw bees coming from a tree, he climbed it quickly, plunged his small black hand deep in the hole that formed the nest, and pulled it out dripping with golden honey. The boy ate greedily, licking his fist as a little bear licks its paw.

At the end of the third day Bundi came upon a little clearing near a water hole. The charred sticks and ashes showed that some blackfellows had enjoyed a feast there. Bundi could picture

it all to himself—the *lubras* taking hot stones from the fire and placing them in the bottom of the pit, then putting the kangaroo in and covering it with more hot stones and then earth. How he longed for kangaroo meat again. How he longed to find his own people.

With the greatest care Bundi searched the ground for footprints that he knew. But the ground was so dry and the tracks were so mixed that he could not tell whether his own people had camped there or not.

For two more days the little boy followed the course of the river. Sometimes he climbed to the edge of the gully in order to look across the plains. Then back to the stream bed he went again. As he walked along, he saw that the trees were smaller and the bushes were yellow. The trees were thirsty, too. The stream bed, where water had once been, finally lost itself on the plains. Ahead, there was nothing but level country with only a few shrubs and bushes.

All hope had gone from Bundi's heart, just as all water had vanished from the bed of the stream that he had been following. Perhaps all his people were dead, lost on the dry plains, like the stream. Bundi had been so sure that he would find them along the water course. But he had not found them.

Where could he go now? He would find neither food nor water on the plains. There would be no comfort back in the bush, for it only made him more lonely to see the baby koalas on their mothers' backs and to hear the birds twittering to each other. The little boy felt the need of his own kind, the need of people's voices and laughter.

Bundi crouched down in the sand, shivering with loneliness and an unknown fear. He nestled deeper and deeper, enjoying the warmth of the sand, as if it were the warmth of another

body. After a long time, he stood up and looked far out into the distance. If only he could find some signs of human life.

At last he saw a fence, and his heart pounded with joy. A fence was a sign of people. He would go to the fence and it would lead him to other human beings. Maybe they would know about the blackfellows who had feasted in the gully.

This fence was not like the fences at Booralong. It was made of fine wire mesh, rather than rails. Beyond the fence there was tall grass. Why had the cattle not eaten this fine grass? Perhaps this fence was not used to hold cattle in.

The plains on Bundi's side of the fence were dry and bare of grass. No animal or human being could live long on those plains. In places, the sand had drifted against the fence and piled up and up.

A little farther on, Bundi stumbled over the body of a dead rabbit. Nearby he saw a great pile of rabbits lying beside the fence. Who had killed them and left them there? Suddenly he knew the answer. The rabbits had died while trying to get through the fence to the grass beyond.

That was why this fence was different from those at Booralong! The wire netting kept the rabbits out. But they could burrow under it, just as they did in building their nests. Bundi began to dig under the fence, and again he found the answer. The white men had put the wire deep under the ground. Maybe he would die of hunger and thirst, too, thought Bundi, just as the rabbits had done, if he had to stay out on the plains.

The heat had become intense. Little waves of heat and sunlight danced and shimmered in front of him. Bundi could not see beyond that dancing light to the place where the plains met the sky. Then, quite suddenly, he saw water ahead. It seemed to be in a big earthen tank like those at Booralong.

Bundi could hardly believe his eyes. But maybe it was only one of those strange pictures—a mirage—that the men of his tribe often told about—pictures which are made by the dancing, dazzling light on the sand, pictures which look so real but always go away. Bundi did not dare to hope. But he walked toward the water because the fence led that way.

When the sky looked pink like the breast of a gallah parrot, Bundi was close to the water tank. Now he was sure it was not a mirage, for he saw a man sitting there, working with some wire frames which lay across his knees.

As Bundi stood watching, the man looked up and motioned him to come nearer. "You come from the blackfellows' camp?" he asked, pointing back toward the gully.

"Blackfellow all gone," said Bundi.

"So you're lost," said the white man. "Better camp here."

Just then a man rode around from behind the camp and threw a heavy bag on the ground. It made a loud clanking sound, and Bundi jumped back in fear. Both men laughed.

"Take a look inside," said the newcomer, who was a Boundary Rider, one who rode the boundary line to see that fences were in repair.

It was several minutes before Bundi could make himself do so. He knew that the men were watching him, and that they thought he was afraid. They would laugh at him again. Bundi did not want to show fear. So he grabbed the bag and loosened the string which closed it. Inside there were many tools, like those that were used at Booralong to mend the fences.

"All time fixem fence," said Bundi, with a smile of pride because he recognized the tools and their use.

"Sure, we have to keep the rabbits out of the sheep runs," explained one of the men. "They've eaten all the grass for miles on this side of the fence."



Bundi jumped back in fear

"What name your station?" asked Bundi.

"Cobba-Cobba, and a fine station it is, too. Not as big as Booralong, but almost."

"Good," said Bundi. *Cobba* meant good in blackfellow language, and Bundi felt that it was good to be with the men from Cobba-Cobba.

While the men were talking with each other, Bundi ran toward the water tank.

"*Coo-ee, coo-ee!*" he called. "No good; no good."

He was looking for a way to get through the fence that went around the tank. He knew that the fence was to keep rabbits away from the water, but surely a little boy could have a drink.

One of the men called Bundi back and poured water from a large bag made of kangaroo hide. The little boy drank greedily from the quart pot which the man had filled. It had been many, many days since he had tasted pure, sweet water.

Bundi watched the men take spoonfuls of white powder from a can, put it on plates, and pour a little hot water over it. Soon the white stuff swelled until it filled the plate. Bundi scooped up the soft, fluffy food with his fingers. It tasted like the potatoes Bundi had eaten at Booralong, but he had never seen a dry white powder swell into a dish of potatoes. This must be whitefellow magic, thought Bundi.

As the campers ate, flocks of yellow-crested white cockatoos swooped down over the tank and stopped at the water's edge to drink. Gallah parrots, gray-backed and pink-breasted, came too. The rabbits, the foxes, and kangaroos were waiting for the cover of darkness.

The shadows of the stunted mulga trees grew longer, and like a moving carpet came the hordes of rabbits, seeking water. The fence barred their way. Round and round they went until

at last one rabbit found the small, V-shaped opening. He slipped through and began lapping the water thirstily. Soon the others followed him. After they had drunk, they began searching for a way out. The small openings which they found did not lead them back to the open plains, but into fenced yards. Here they were trapped, while the hundreds of other rabbits poured into the yard behind them.

Struggling and squealing, they fought to get free. Fences were holding them in just as the fence at Booralong had held in the frightened cattle. Bundi's heart went out to them. He knew this feeling of being trapped.

By the dim light of the stars, he saw two foxes leap over the fence and lap up water, side by side with the rabbits. The foxes never thought of the rabbits as food; they wanted only water. Suddenly a kangaroo hopped into view, and immediately there was a shot. Bundi lay down and buried his face in the earth, frightened as an animal.

When he looked up again the men were dragging the big body of the kangaroo toward the camp. He heard one of them say, "This one won't kick our fences down any more."

When the yards were full of rabbits, the men lifted the fence around the water so that the animals held there could escape. The traps were already filled with as many rabbits as the men could skin that night.

The next morning Bundi saw hundreds of little wire frames stuck in the ground. Each frame was covered with a furry rabbit skin stretched out to dry.



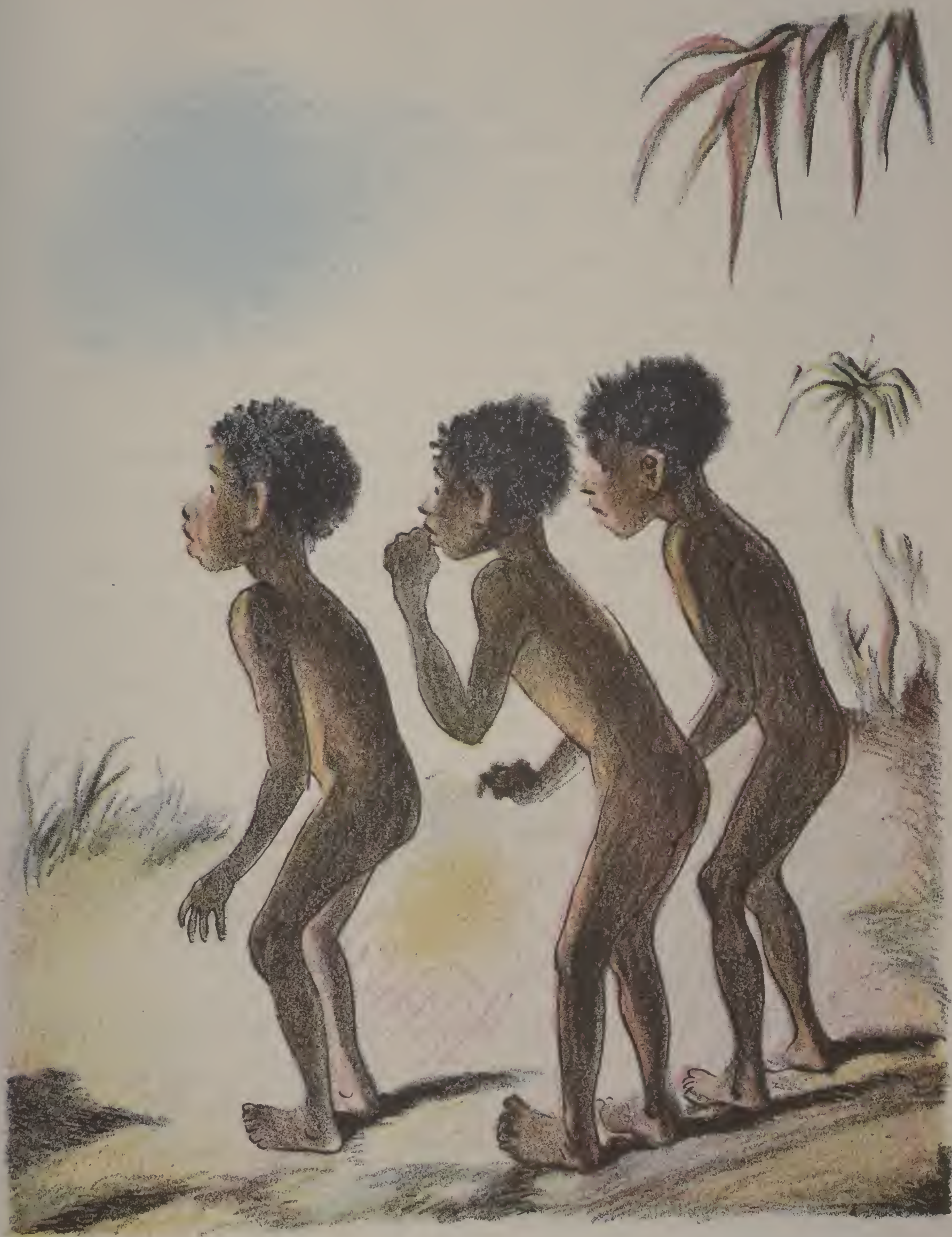


Chapter VII

FRIENDS AT COBBA-COBBA

When Bundi was halfway between dreaming and waking, the troubled thoughts which he had lost in sleep came again. "*Bunyip!*" he called in fright. He thought the *bunyip*, or evil spirit feared by all the people of his tribe, was near. The Medicine Man had often frightened the little boys by telling them stories of the *bunyip* who would get them if they were bad.

With the morning there came another fear that had haunted Bundi for many days—the fear of never again seeing his own people, the fear of dying of thirst out on the plains. His new friends had told him that he must go to Cobba-Cobba until after the rains came. If he did this, however, he would be just as far away from his own people as ever. But what could he do? He would die like the rabbits if he stayed on the plains.



The medicine man had often frightened the little boys

It was a most unhappy little boy who rode behind the Boundary Rider to Cobba-Cobba. The homestead, the sheds, and the yards all brought back memories of Booralong. But perhaps it would be different at Cobba-Cobba. Perhaps Bundi could be a tracker, or a horse-tailer, or a stockman!

When they reached Cobba-Cobba, the men took him to one of the blackfellows' *humpies* or cabins, where Coola, a large kindly black *lubra*, made him welcome. Coola was the wife of Binong, one of the blackfellows who worked at the station. She made Bundi think of his own mother, and a sudden tight feeling came into his throat. He wanted to feel her strong arms about him; he wanted to be held close. He had been lonely for so many, many days. Determined to be brave, Bundi forced back the sobs which seemed to tear his chest to get out.

Soon he was eating supper and drinking tea with the station blackfellows. Then he heard laughter. It was high and shrill, not the soft low laughter of blackfellow children at play. There was the pat-a-pat of bare feet on a path, and in another moment two young boys rushed headlong into camp.

"I beat," said the larger boy, panting for breath.

"I won the last race anyway," said the other, still gasping.

Bundi smiled at the boys. He knew about races, although it was a long time since he had played with children. How these two white boys could run! Bundi's eyes shone with excitement. He longed to run and play with them.

Peter, the smaller boy, saw Bundi first.

"Hello, Bundi," he said. "Jim told us that he brought you in from the Rabbiter's camp. We came here to see you."

"And we brought you some clothes," said Bob, the larger boy, holding out a pair of blue trousers and a gray shirt.

"Thank you big mob," said Bundi, too shy to go up to the boys as he really wanted to do.

Peter came closer. "We're Bob and Peter and we live up at Government House," he explained. "Coola will bring you up there some time. Binong will bring you to the horse paddock and we'll show you our ponies."

"We'll see you tomorrow, Bundi," said Bob.

Then they were off, racing back to the yards like two wild things. Bundi wanted to run with these boys. They could run almost as fast as blackfellow boys. Bundi felt as if he were back at his own camp near his own friends. Maybe Bob and Peter would be his friends.

Of course Bundi didn't know that Bob and Peter were just as interested in him as he was in them. It was not often that visitors came to Cobba-Cobba, especially little boys. Peter and Bob rode their ponies to school each day, but there they saw only four other children from the next sheep station, and the governess.

"My, he must be brave," said Bob, as the boys were returning to Government House. "Imagine coming all the way from Boora-long alone. I'll bet he can tell us all about blackfellows hunting kangaroos and killing snakes and finding water holes."

It was hard for Bundi to rouse himself the next morning. All night long he had dreamed that he was riding off across the plains on a brown and white spotted pony, riding with his bare legs hugging the warm body of the horse. He had been riding fast, with the wind blowing strong on his face. Bundi was afraid that the happy feeling would go when he opened his eyes. For so many, many mornings he had wakened with the fear of thirst or hunger.

Coola was calling him in her soft voice, "Bundi, come get *tucker*."

The boy opened his eyes and saw Coola's smiling face. She held out the shirt and trousers. It was good to see her there.

Besides, his breakfast was ready. Well, perhaps it was good to be at Cobba-Cobba! Then Bundi remembered Bob and Peter and their ponies. He was sure that they were real even if his dream wasn't. Perhaps he would ride the ponies some day!

While Bundi was eating, he looked off across the plains. How good it was to be with people and not alone out on the wide plains. How good it was to have food, to smell the smoke of a campfire. But he would go bush after the rains came. Yes, he would go and find his father's people. These blackfellows jabbering around the fire were not of his own tribe. They even talked whitefellow talk. Then Bundi smiled to himself. Why, he talked whitefellow talk too! Perhaps his own people would think him strange. But he would talk blackfellow talk when he went bush. He would forget about whitefellow ways.

Bundi was glad when Coola said that he could go up to Government House with her. He might see the boys there. The path to Government House was worn smooth and bare of grass. In the early morning it felt cool to his bare feet. It seemed a very special path to Bundi, for it led to the house where his new friends lived.





Chapter VIII

BUNDI LEARNS TO RIDE

Peter and Bob were sitting on a bench at the back of the house, busily whittling a piece of wood. As the boys looked up and saw him, something made Bundi turn and run. He hid behind the shed.

The little blackfellow had moved so swiftly that Peter and Bob were not sure they had actually seen him.

Coola laughed. "Him not afraid; him just play shy game," she said.

Bob called, "We're coming to find you, Bundi."

Bundi smiled, but he didn't move toward them. The queer feeling had gone, but he waited for the boys to come. In a minute, the three boys were all laughing together.

"My word, you look like a fine fellow," said Bob, admiring Bundi in his new clothes.

Bundi felt as proud as if he had been dressed for a feast.

"Me come see you," he said.

"Fine. Father said we could show you the ponies and then you can learn to help Binong with the horses," explained Peter.

This was more than Bundi had hoped for. He was to have a man's work at Cobba-Cobba, not the degrading work of the *lubras*. As Bundi followed the boys across the yard, he noticed the green grass, the blooming flowers and rich ferns. He wondered who carried water to all the plants. A shiver of delight ran through him as he realized that *he* would not have to water them.

As Bob fastened the gate he turned and said to Peter, "Remember it's your turn to water Mother's flowers today."

Bundi was shocked. Did Bob and Peter have to do *lubra's* work? But when Bob said, "Let's race to the paddock," every other thought was driven from Bundi's mind.

Bundi's legs were like springs suddenly loosened. He knew that he could beat Peter and Bob. His body was slim and his legs were long. He had learned to run when he was a tiny child, to run fast enough to save his life, if need be. Past the sheds and on across an open paddock ran the excited little blackfellow.

"Stop, Bundi!" called Bob. "You've won!"

Bundi trotted back, his black face shining.

"I'll bet you could catch a kangaroo," praised Peter.

"Me bin catchem one, some day," answered Bundi.

"Will you really?" asked Peter. "I want one more than anything else in the world. For a long time, Father and the men have been trying to get me a kangaroo *joey* for a pet. But they have never been able to catch one."

"Me catchem kangaroo *joey*," promised Bundi. He remembered how the men of his tribe carried bushes and branches of

trees to hide behind as they crept close to feeding kangaroos. How fine it would be to catch a little kangaroo for the boys.

"The sheep are out on the runs," explained Bob, as they walked past the long, low shearing shed, "but soon they'll be brought in to have their wool shorn. Then it will be put in bags and kept in this shed until it can be sent away."

"Shearing time is the most fun of all," added Peter. "Father lets us stay home from school to help. It will soon be time for it again. Maybe you can help, too, Bundi."

As they climbed over the paddock fence, Bob began calling, "Here, Cub, Cub," and Peter called, "Come, Star. Here, Star."

From among the feeding horses, two small ponies raised their heads, shook out their manes, and came galloping toward the boys. One of the ponies whinnied in answer to his master. Bundi hoped that it was the one named Star. The stars had long been Bundi's friends, and he wanted this pony to be a friend too. When the pony came near, Bundi saw that it was brown and white, just like the one in his dream.

"See, Bundi, mine has a white star on his face," said Peter, as he fondly stroked the pony's nose.

Bundi didn't even hear him. He was thinking about the pony of his dream and how it had moved so gently and yet so swiftly, as if the wind were blowing it along.

The ponies stood beside their young masters, nuzzling their noses against the boys' arms. The boys knew what their pets were coaxing for, and laughingly they pulled lumps of sugar from their pockets.

Bundi wished the brown and white pony would rub against his shoulder. "Him good pony," said Bundi, looking at Star.

"Here, you can give him a lump of sugar," said Peter, handing Bundi a big piece.

Seeing the sugar, Star put his nose against Bundi's hand. Bundi let him coax for a moment, enjoying the touch of that soft nose. Then he opened his fist and Star took the sugar daintily with his lips.

"Ever ride a horse?" asked Bob.

Bundi wanted to say, "Yes," and tell about his dream ride, but he said only, "Come to Cobba-Cobba on horse."

"That wasn't riding," said Peter. "That was just hanging on behind one of the men. Better try it all by yourself."

Bundi's eyes sparkled with joy. Was he really going to ride so soon? How happy he was that he had come to Cobba-Cobba.

"Yes," agreed Bob. "Let's teach Bundi to ride this morning. It's Saturday and we don't go to school. Then when Father comes in from the runs we'll show him what Bundi can do."

At Booralong, Bundi had often watched the stockmen mount their horses. It seemed quite natural for him to grab the pony's mane with his left hand, rest his right hand on the pony's shoulder and throw his right leg over its back. Bob and Peter were surprised that he did it so well.

"Sure you haven't done that before?" asked Bob.

Bundi only smiled and nudged the pony ever so little with his bare heels. For reins, he held a bit of Star's long mane. He gripped the silky body with his legs, urging the pony to go faster and faster. He wanted to feel the wind in his face as he had felt it in his dream. The pony was only trotting, so Bundi patted its neck. That seemed to be a signal to Star, and he began to gallop. Bundi slipped a bit, but he managed to hang on.

"Whoa, Star! Steady, boy!" called Peter.

At the command of his master, Star slowed to a walk at once. Bundi was sorry.

"Were you frightened?" asked Bob when Bundi rode back to the boys.



Bundi slipped a bit, but he managed to hang on

"Star goodfellow," was the only answer.

As he slipped down from the pony, Bundi thanked Peter. "You goodfellow. You let Bundi ride."

Bundi soon learned to take care of the ponies, to brush their shiny coats and comb their manes and tails. He learned to catch the ponies when they were loose in the paddock and to put on saddles and bridles.

One afternoon after Bundi had rubbed down the ponies, he swung himself onto Star's back to have a little ride. He tried to sit as straight as Peter and to let his body follow the movements of the pony, as if he and the animal were one. Then he patted Star's neck and repeated the words he had often heard Peter use. "Come on, Star. Come, boy. Fast!"

Star was ready for a wild gallop. Bundi leaned low on the pony's neck and gripped with his legs. Around and around the paddock they went, as if it were a race course. Bundi thought of nothing but the joy of that flying movement. He talked to Star in his own language, speaking soft words that were strange to the pony. Bundi pretended that he was chasing a big red kangaroo, and he raised his right arm as if ready to thrust a spear. Just then he heard a shout.

"Bravo! Good! Hurrah for Bundi!"

As if this were a signal for him to stop, the pony slowed to a trot. Bundi gasped in surprise when he saw that the boss and two other men had been watching him. In the joy of the galloping movement, he had forgotten that anyone else in the world existed.

He slid down from Star's back, not knowing whether they were pleased with him or not. He had heard only a shout; the words had meant nothing. The boss had never seen Bundi ride before. Perhaps he was angry because the pony was going so fast.

"Good riding," said the boss, when Bundi got off the pony. "You'll be a fine musterer some day. Very soon I will give you a horse to ride."

Bundi smiled his happiness. He couldn't say a word.

That night, at dusk, Bundi walked swiftly along the path to Government House. When he reached the shadow of a shed he paused and called softly, "*Coo . . . ee! Coo . . . ee! Coo . . . ee!*"

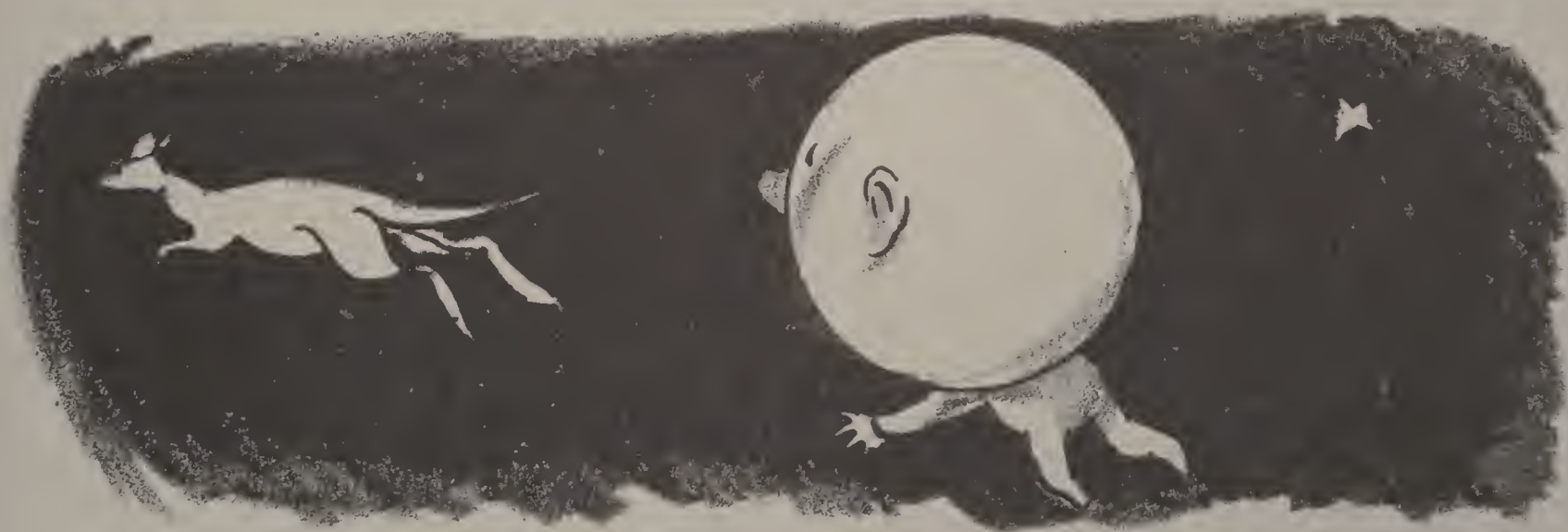
Bob and Peter heard the signal and in a few minutes they ran around the side of the house and found Bundi waiting for them in the shadow.

Before they could speak, Bundi said, "You big mob goodfellow. Boss big mob goodfellow. He give Bundi horse to ride some day. Bundi catch *joey* kangaroo for you some day."

"We know you'd do anything you could for us," said Bob. "You goodfellow, too, Bundi."

Peter added, "I'd rather have a little kangaroo than any other kind of a pet except Star. We'll tell Father that you said he was a big mob goodfellow."

Bundi was content, now that he had told the boys his thoughts. He turned and went silently back along the shadowy path under the Mallee trees. That night as he lay on the ground and looked up at the stars, he pretended that they were kangaroos and the moon was a little blackfellow tracking down a pet for Peter and Bob.



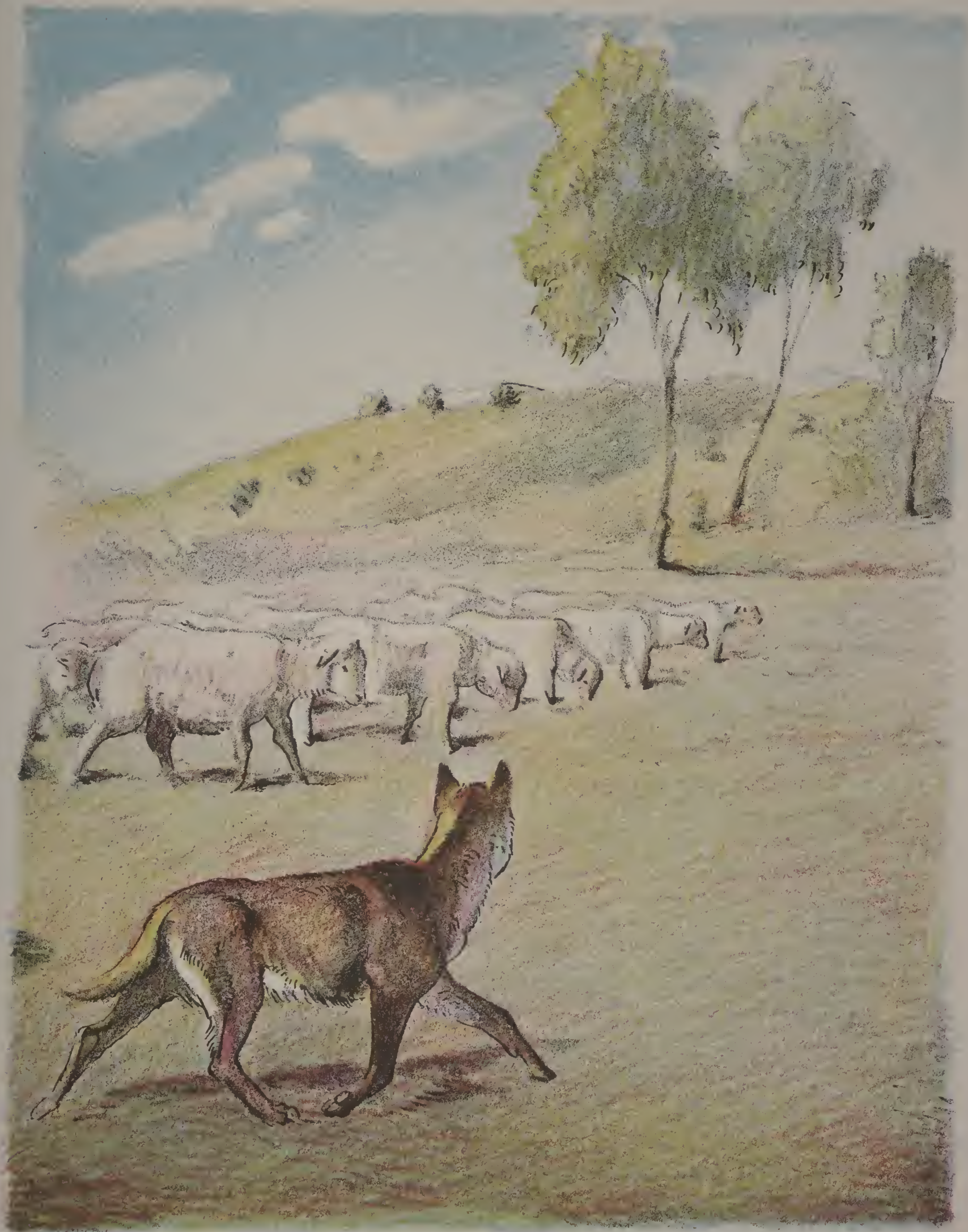


Chapter IX

BUNDI RUNS AWAY

The next morning, when Bundi rolled over and cupped his chin in his hands to have a look about, things looked different. Coola and Binong were not around. They had gone to their work before Bundi wakened. That had never happened before. No one squatted near the fire either. Something terrible must have happened at Cobba-Cobba. The old unhappy feeling of loneliness swept over Bundi.

All of a sudden Bundi remembered. This was the morning that the first mob of sheep would be brought in from the runs. Today they would be shorn and then sent naked back to the paddocks. Bundi jumped up and dressed quickly. There was not a minute to lose. Men were hurrying in every direction, like a swarm of bees.



*This was the morning that the first mob of sheep
would be brought in*

Bundi ran to the paddock first of all, but even the ponies were not there. Today everything was different at Cobba-Cobba. Then Bundi heard a long-drawn-out "*Coo . . . ee*," and another and another. It was Peter's special call. Bundi answered with three long-drawn-out "*Coo . . . ees*" to tell Peter that he was coming.

Peter and Bob had ridden out to one of the paddocks to find out when the sheep would be in. One of the musterers told them that the first mob of sheep was expected about noon. Peter had hurried back to get Bundi so that he might share in the excitement.

A few hours later the three boys were waiting at the paddock gate when the first mob of sheep came in sight. The sheep walked slowly, cropping the grass along the way, and bleating when the sheep dogs tried to hurry them.

Bundi could not take his eyes from the dogs. They were not like the *dingoes*, or wild dogs, which the blackfellows sometimes trained. The *dingoes* always chased to kill; these sheep dogs were guiding the flock, not chasing it. Three sheep dogs held the mob while the musterers on horseback rounded up stray sheep. When two sheep suddenly tried to break from the mob, one of the dogs shot forward, blocked their path, and then stood still, seeming to hold them by some magic power. For a moment the sheep didn't move. Then slowly they turned and went back to the mob. They knew who was their master.

"Good dog, Bluey!" shouted Peter.

Every little while other sheep broke from the mob, but the dogs nipped them on their heels and sent them back where they belonged.

"Aren't they fine sheep and aren't the dogs wonderful?" asked Peter, with pride in his voice, pride in Cobba-Cobba, its men and its dogs.

Bundi did not answer, for he was suddenly filled with another

kind of excitement. He wanted to see the dogs rush the sheep. He wanted to see a wild chase. He wanted to see one of his own blackfellows with a spear ready to thrust. All that was wild in his nature rose up, and his eyes danced with the excitement of the chase he saw in his mind.

Peter looked at him strangely. "Don't you think it's good work, Bundi?"

"No good," he answered, almost crossly.

"But it is good," explained Peter. "Those men and dogs are doing wonderful work. I want to be a musterer some day and you could be, too, like the blackfellows here."

"Me kill kangaroo," said Bundi, and his voice sounded as if he meant to do it that very moment.

Peter turned to him in surprise. "Well, sometimes kangaroos are pests on sheep stations and the men kill them to save the grass for the sheep. But I like kangaroos and I want one for a pet. Don't you remember, Bundi, that you promised to get me one?"

There was a strange light in Bundi's eyes that Peter had never seen before. As Peter watched him he felt that Bundi was miles away. He had suddenly become a very different little boy from the one Peter and Bob had known so well.

The boys watched until all the sheep had been driven through the gate into the smaller paddock to wait their turn for shearing. Then they rode back to the station buildings. The place looked like a busy village, with bicycles standing against the fences, strange cars loaded with blanket rolls and parcels, strange horses tied to hitching posts.

"More shearers have come," shouted Peter.

"Father said I could help them," said Bob. "I'm to be tar-boy."

"Perhaps we can be, too," said Peter to Bundi. "Let's find Father and ask."



"Me sit down in *humpy*," said Bundi in a small, strange voice.

"Have you a stomach ache?" asked Peter. "You must be sick if you want to go to your *humpy* when all this fun is going on."

Bundi turned away without answering. Peter and Bob were too absorbed in the shearing to notice where he went.

All day long Bundi wandered around, filled with a sense of strangeness and aloneness. There were strangers everywhere, and his old friends could not be found. Bundi went to one bunkhouse after another, but all were empty. Everyone was busy with the shearing. Bundi felt frightened. There were too many strangers about. He felt more alone than he had on the plains, where there was no other human being. Cobba-Cobba seemed like Booralong, a place where he could never feel at home, and cosy and content.

Then, quite suddenly, he decided what he must do. He must run away; he must go bush and find his people. The time had come. His legs seemed glad to run, as if they had been cramped for a long time. Which way he was going he did not know. He was trying only to get away from Cobba-Cobba and the loneliness. A song ran through his head, the song that the men always sang before the hunt. Bundi was off on a hunt now. He ran across the paddocks, beyond the fences, on and on, under the stars.

He stripped off his clothes, as he had done once before. Now he was like his own people; now he could feel the cool air against his body. He picked up a stick and pretended that it was a boomerang. Somehow this made him feel less lonely. When utter weariness forced him to stop, he lay down on the ground, and sleep came quickly.





Chapter X

BUNDI FINDS A BABY KANGAROO

In the morning Bundi was wakened by a soft thud, thud. He lay perfectly still and listened, as the sound kept coming nearer. He knew, without even looking around, that it was a kangaroo. He lay quite still, so as not to frighten the little animal away, and he planned exactly what he was going to do. He reached for a nearby stick and clutched his stick tightly, every nerve in his body tingling with excitement and happiness. He was a black-fellow boy on the hunt for food. He was going to kill a kangaroo! This was the kind of wild excitement he had felt when he watched the sheep and the dogs.

The soft thud was coming very close. Bundi wondered if he could use his stick as a boomerang. He had often seen his father send the curved, sharp-edged boomerang twirling through the air to break a kangaroo's leg. Then he had crept up and hit the animal with a *waddy*, or club.

When Bundi sat up and saw the kangaroo, he was startled, too startled to move. It was such a little kangaroo. Bundi had never before been so close to such a tiny one. His fingers gradually loosened their hold on the stick. He seemed to hear Peter say, "I want him for a pet, Bundi."

Slowly the little blackfellow dropped his stick. He did not want to kill this baby animal; he wanted to take it to Peter. He wanted to see Peter's eyes shine when he saw his new pet.

Bundi's one desire now was to catch the little animal without hurting it the tiniest bit. But the little kangaroo began hopping away. He stood on his hind legs and pushed with his tail and went hop, hop, hop. Then he stood on his hind legs and propped himself with his tail, as if he were resting on a three-legged stool. But why did he stop to rest when a stranger was near? Wasn't he a wild animal, and weren't all wild animals afraid of human beings?

Then Bundi guessed that the baby kangaroo had never seen a human being before and so did not know that they were creatures to fear. This *joey* was still small enough to be riding in his mother's pouch. But where was the mother? There was no other living creature to be seen.

As Bundi watched him, the little animal began to hop more quickly. Then he wobbled and fell over, hitting his nose on the ground. Bundi laughed merrily, wishing that Peter and Bob could see the comical little animal.

Bundi decided to walk about a bit and let the kangaroo get



used to him. Soon he found the mother, lying by a low saltbush. Her thin body, with the bones sticking through the flesh, showed that she had died of thirst, just like the rabbits Bundi had seen. The baby had lived in her pouch and sucked milk from her body, but now he must take care of himself.

As the *joey* toppled over again, Bundi's heart went out to this little lone creature. He knew how it felt to be alone, to be hungry and thirsty. He wanted to take the little creature in his arms, to have it nestle close to his body and take comfort in the warmth of another living being.

Bundi moved forward cautiously and quietly. The kangaroo heard him and tried to lift its head, but sank back on the warm sandy earth. Bundi loved the helpless little animal; he wanted to mother it. At that moment his own loneliness left him completely. He had something to love now, something that needed him.



Soon he found the mother, lying by a low saltbush

He stretched out his hand and touched the quivering black nose. The skin felt soft, like the skin of a little blackfellow baby. The kangaroo whined softly, and a shiver passed along its body like the rings of water on a pool after a stone is thrown into it.

When Bundi took the tiny animal in his arms and held him close, a strange feeling of contentment passed over him. It was better than drinking water when he was thirsty, or filling his stomach when he was hungry. It made him glad to be alone with the baby kangaroo and to lay his cheek against its warm body. It was his own; it was his to love and care for. Bundi was content.

With the little animal in his arms, Bundi trudged back to Cobba-Cobba. Often he stroked the silky hair, which was the color of sheep's wool with some of the red dust in it. When Bundi stopped to rest, he laid the kangaroo on the warm earth. The little fellow was too weak to get up. He seemed content to be with Bundi, and Bundi was always eager to pick him up again and hurry on to Cobba-Cobba.

Bundi remembered how fast he had run away from Cobba-Cobba the night before. Now, for the first time in many weeks, he was really happy. The little kangaroo had pushed all loneliness out of his heart. His heart felt glad because he could feel another little heart beating against his body.

When Bundi finally reached the wool shed of Cobba-Cobba he stopped and stared. Camels squatted on all fours while men were tying bales of wool on their backs. The animals were held together by ropes fastened from the nose of one to the tail of the one in front. But Bundi could not stay to watch. He had a gift for Peter. Where were Peter and Bob? Where were any of the people Bundi knew?

Strange men looked at Bundi and then hurried on. A big lorry, or wagon, piled high with brown sacks of wool, stood near.

Many pairs of bullocks were being yoked to it. But Bundi wasn't frightened by the strangeness now. He was thinking about helping the *joey* to get well and strong. He hugged the little kangaroo close.

Then Bundi remembered that Bob was to be tar-boy and would be in the shearing shed. Perhaps Peter would be there too. This shed was the busiest place at Cobba-Cobba. Bundi hurried past the dozens of little box-like stalls, glancing into each one in the hope of finding Peter and Bob. Now and then he bumped into men carrying armfuls of wool. The sheep were bleating as the shearers grabbed them, set them down on their haunches, and held their heads between their knees. There was a steady hum of wheels turning and clippers peeling wool from the animals.

One of the shearers called, "Tar-boy!" Peter or Bob would soon come in answer to this call. So Bundi waited there, with the little kangaroo asleep in his arms. In a couple of minutes, Peter came hurrying along with his pail of tar. When he saw Bundi and the kangaroo, he almost dropped the pail. The shearer was impatient. "Tar, tar," he called again.

Peter held out the pail, and the man grabbed the stick and daubed some hot tar on the place where the sheep was cut.

Then Peter set the pail down, and Bundi held out the little pet to his friend. Peter gasped. "Oh, Bundi! Is he really mine?"

Bundi could not speak, but the light in his eyes seemed to overflow into his face and make it shine. It seemed to say, "Here is the pet I promised to get for you."

When Bundi saw the answering shine in Peter's eyes, he knew that he belonged with Peter too. Together they would take care of the little animal and make him strong and well.

All in one breath Peter asked, "Where did you get him? Where is the mother? Is he asleep?"



Bundi told the story and finished by saying, "Him sick; him hungry. Bundi no want kill any more. Bundi bring pet to you. Bundi help him get well."

Peter's mother gave the boys a dish of warm milk for their pet. Still holding the little kangaroo, Peter dipped his hand in the milk and then put a finger in the animal's mouth. The hungry *joey* sucked eagerly and tried to open his eyes. Peter had often taught little lambs to drink that way.

Then Bundi dipped his hand into the milk. Peter understood that Bundi loved this baby animal. So he let Bundi feed him for awhile.

Bundi felt a wonderful happiness as the soft tongue sucked the milk from his finger and the little tail moved ever so slightly as strength came back to the baby kangaroo. This little animal was his. He had saved its life. But he had given it to Peter! Then Bundi must stay with Peter, too.

The world had become small and snug and close. There were no far places where he would be forever searching for his people. There was only Cobba-Cobba and Peter and the baby kangaroo.

With every glance of his shining blue eyes, Peter said, "Thank you, Bundi, for my dear little baby kangaroo."

And with every glance of his bright black eyes, Bundi was saying, "You goodfellow, Peter; you good whitefellow."

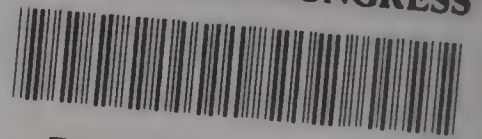
That night as he looked up at the stars, Bundi thought, "Blackfellow stars are whitefellow stars too. All same! The plains belong to blackfellows and whitefellows too. Bundi have big mob blackfellow people and big mob whitefellow people. Peter and Bob are Bundi's whitefellow people and Cobba-Cobba is goodfellow home."







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